

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE TOM PRICE (R-GA)
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
HEARING ON “TEACHER EQUITY: EFFECTIVE TEACHERS FOR ALL CHILDREN”
SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

Good morning and thank you, Chairman Miller and Ranking Member Kline.

The month of September marks the beginning of the school year for many localities across the country. And for the next year, the one person who will have more influence and input other than a set of parents into a child’s development will be a teacher.

For those with a young one who is entering school for the very first time, you know these are the most crucial years for learning and growth. And it goes without saying that teacher quality has proven to be one of the most important school-related factors influencing student achievement.

Now, the goal of this particular hearing is to examine the progress states and localities have made toward ensuring every child is taught by an effective teacher. In order to accomplish this, some have mistakenly believed that we can only realize a type of equal distribution through government mandates. In fact to the contrary, mandates, combined with tenure rules and collective bargaining agreements, make this more difficult. Such a framework creates rigidity in labor markets and puts up more hurdles and barricades.

It is why Republicans in the House of Representatives have rejected this approach and embraced a much different path. For the third Congress in a row, Republicans on this Committee are introducing the *Teacher Incentive Fund Act*, a measure designed to place more high quality teachers in the most hard to staff localities through the implementation of performance-based compensation systems.

The Teacher Incentive Fund permits states and local school districts to apply for federal grants in order to develop, implement or improve performance-based compensation systems for teachers and principals.

These systems primarily differentiate compensation on the basis of increases in student achievement. Educators may be paid bonuses and increased salaries, and they may also be rewarded for staffing high-need subject areas, fulfilling additional job functions, or demonstrating superior teaching skills.

The Teacher Incentive Fund does not operate through a series of mandates, but rather it relies on granting as much flexibility as possible to local school districts to create their own unique systems. It rejects a one-size-fits-all approach from Washington and places localities in a position to succeed without permanent interference from Congress. And it is why a local school district may only receive a grant one time with a decreasing federal match – we want localities to own and administer these systems over the long-term!

Of course, none of the success would be possible without local buy in. And, the success of the Teacher Incentive Fund, a currently unauthorized program which has received support from two Presidents, is already well-documented. Just take the testimony before this Committee last Congress from Dr. Joseph Burke, the Superintendent of Schools in Springfield, Massachusetts:

The Teacher Incentive Fund creates the opportunity for highly motivated and courageous school reformers to change tightly held traditions in education. In fact, the Teacher Incentive Fund has served as a catalyst for reform in the Springfield Public Schools. Working in collaboration with our local teachers union, we have created a way to measure teacher performance based on a teacher's ability to improve student achievement.

Creating opportunities, incentives and rewards via traditional market forces – not mandates – will lower teacher attrition rates and make teaching jobs in hard to staff schools more attractive. If we want every child taught by a highly effective teacher, let's create the mechanisms to do so through the Teacher Incentive Fund.

Thank you.